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19 March 1963

SUBJECT: Need for Low-Level Reconnaissance of Cuba
in Connection with Soviet Troop Withdrawals

REFERENCE: USIB-D-41, 14/13 (COMOR-D-24/48), 21 Feb 63.

1. The United States Intelligence Board on 21 February approved the requirements for low-level reconnaissance of both Soviet military camps and unidentified installations in Cuba (see reference). That document states:

Order of battle for ground forces . . . cannot be fully established from high-level photography or apparently from collateral sources. Low-level photography, if carried out comprehensively and simultaneously, might enable us to make a more valid appraisal of the extent of Soviet deployment, including indications of the introduction or pullout of personnel and equipment or turnover of equipment to the Cubans.

It also recommended that high-level photography be supplemented by low-level photography of certain unidentified installations.

2. Since 21 February and especially since 6 March which was the last time that the Board considered the need for low-level reconnaissance of Cuba, high-altitude coverage almost daily over the four largest Soviet military camps, Artemisa, Remedios, Holguin, and Santiago de las Vegas, and the headquarters at Torrens has failed to reveal signs of withdrawal which would equate to the numbers of Soviet military personnel known to have sailed from Havana. Indeed, with the exception of the removal of a few tents and a radar or communications site at Holguin and the observation on two occasions of some unidentified gear between barracks wings at Remedios, the appearance of the camps, as interpreted from high-level photography, has been remarkably static, with little evidence of the sort of activity which might be expected if the camps were as occupied as they have been estimated to be. It is impossible on the basis of high altitude coverage and limited ground sightings by Western observers to identify the units locations, or arms of service from which the departing personnel have been withdrawn.

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3. The estimate of 17,500 Soviet military personnel in Cuba is based on a manning factor for the military equipment and Soviet installations known to be present in Cuba. The actual number of Soviet military personnel in Cuba could have been less, even prior to the recent departures. It is essential, therefore, to attempt to determine whether the major Soviet camps are manned on a more than caretaker basis. Low-level coverage offers a greater possibility of making this determination and of discovering signs of impending or accomplished troop withdrawals.

4. At the same time, the suspicions held concerning certain of the 18 unidentified installations in Cuba listed in Tab A of the referenced report continue in force, and the prospects for clarification from other than low-level coverage continue to be small.

5. The community is in agreement with regard to the need for low-level reconnaissance of the 5 military camps. Whereas on a long-term basis the unidentified installations are of prime importance for coverage, the coverage of the 5 military camps is critical at the moment in connection with reported troop withdrawal.

6. Recommendation: It is recommended that low-level photographic missions be initiated over the Soviet camps at Artemisa, Remedios, Holguin, Santiago de las Vegas, and Torrens and the unidentified installations at El Horno, Mayari Arriba, Santiago de Cuba, and the underground installations at Holguin (No. 13 at Tab A of Ref).

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Chairman
Committee on Overhead Reconnaissance